

Outpatient Waiting Time in Health Services and Teaching Hospitals: A Case Study in Iran

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Abstract

Background: One of the most important indexes of the health care quality is patient's satisfaction and it takes place only when there is a process based on management. One of these processes in the health care organizations is the appropriate management of the waiting time process. The aim of this study is the systematic analyzing of the outpatient waiting time.

Methods: This descriptive cross sectional study conducted in 2011 is an applicable study performed in the educational and health care hospitals of one of the medical universities located in the north west of Iran. Since the distributions of outpatients in all the months were equal, sampling stage was used. 160 outpatients were studied and the data was analyzed by using SPSS software.

Results: Results of the study showed that the waiting time for the outpatients of ophthalmology clinic with an average of 245 minutes for each patient allocated the maximum time among the other clinics for itself. Orthopedic clinic had the minimal waiting time including an average of 77 minutes per patient. The total average waiting time for each patient in the educational hospitals under this study was about 161 minutes.

Conclusion: by applying some models, we can reduce the waiting time especially in the realm of time and space before the admission to the examination room. Utilizing the models including the one before admission, electronic visit systems via internet, a process model, six sigma model, queuing theory model and FIFO model, are the components of the intervention that reduces the outpatient waiting time.

Keywords: outpatient, quality, queuing theory, FIFO, hospital

1. Introduction

In response to the certain conditions of each period, the health care organizations have observed major changes. These Various changes included the rapid growth of technology costs of the health sector. Increasing complexity of processes along with the increasing competition among the institutions of health care services have changed the opinion of the experts towards the health care systems providing the health services (Aeinparast, Tabibi, Shahanaghi, & Arianeshad, 2009). Nowadays customer care in all the organizations particularly the health care organizations has advanced and progressed and has a specific symbol. One of the comprehensive factors for the patients in the health care organizations is actually the criteria considered for the suitable and desirable treatment which is rapid and suitable. Prompt treatment in hospitals means to minimize the time for getting a health service with an emphasis on the favorable treatment (Dansky & Miles, 1997). All the organizations providing the health services tend to reduce the number of patients admitted in order to reduce the costs and increase the income, in addition providing opportunities for the people has resulted in the increased number of outpatients over the past decade (Eldabi, Irani, & Paul, 2002).

Changes and major challenges in the health sector have led to the changes in the outpatient services showing the appropriate management of these centers (Visser, 1998). Delays in the access to the medical services are an